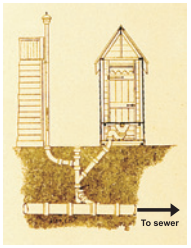
Melbourne's Sewerage System

Putting an end to "Smell-bourne"

Melbourne's Sewerage System collects, transports, treats and disposes of all the sewage produced in the metropolitan area. Until 1897, the city did not have the facility for clearing its waste and – despite its robust economy and wonderful buildings – it was known far and wide as **"Marvellous Smellbourne"**.

The present system was developed in one mammoth effort in the 1890s after 60 years of complaint, make do, inadequate proposals and ad-hoc attempts at disposing of human and other waste.



Sewers & Mains

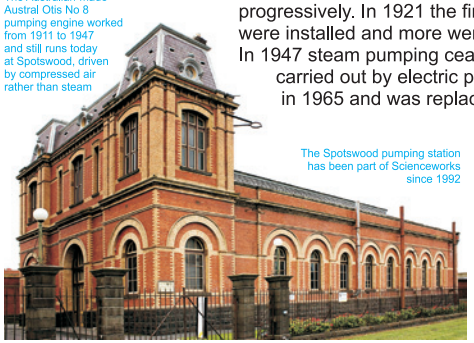
Every house and business had a four inch (100 mm) connection to a sewer in the street. The network of sewers progressively became larger as they collected larger flows. These eventually emptied into three large Trunk Sewers which converged at Spotswood Pumping Station. Those coming from the city and south-eastern suburbs crossed under the Yarra River near Spotswood.

Spotswood Pumping Station

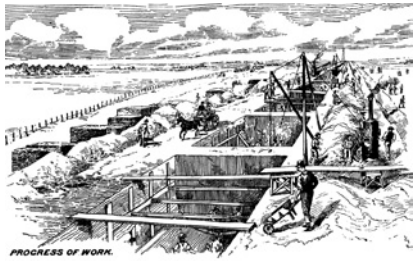
A large pumping station was built at Spotswood and ten steam-powered pumping engines were installed progressively. In 1921 the first electrically-driven pumps were installed and more were added over the years. In 1947 steam pumping ceased and all pumping was carried out by electric pumps. Spotswood closed in 1965 and was replaced by Brooklyn Pumping Station.

Photo: Owen Peake

The Australian-made Austral Otis No 8 pumping engine worked from 1911 to 1947 and still runs today at Spotswood, driven by compressed air rather than steam

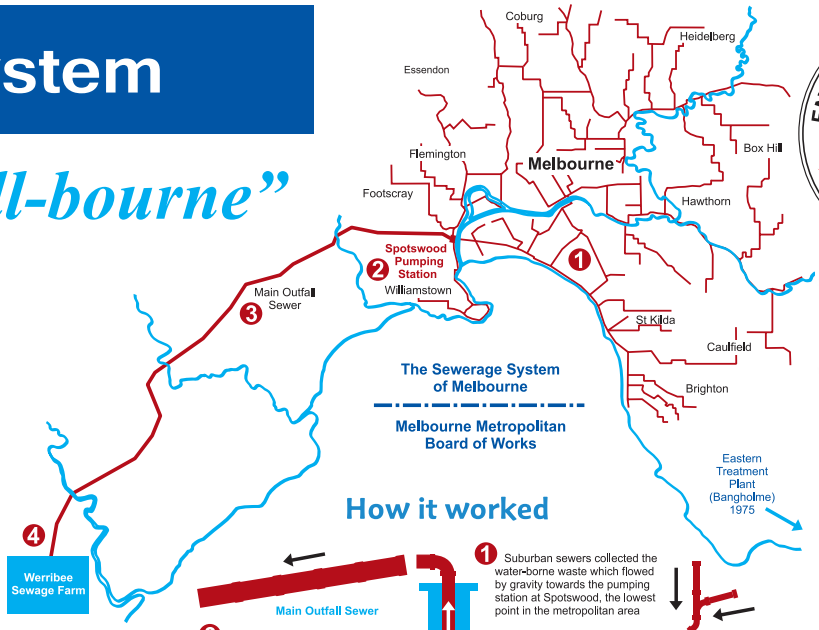


The Spotswood pumping station has been part of Scienceworks since 1992



Australasian Sketcher, 9 April 1882

Digging the Main Outfall Sewer in 1882



Western Treatment Plant

When the scheme started, the sewage was used to irrigate thousands of acres of land for crops and grazing. However, this method could not cope with Melbourne's growing population and a new system was introduced in the 1930s. Natural algae treat the sewage in a system of large shallow lagoons which now handle 60% of Melbourne's total sewage output. Farming is still carried out on the extensive site.

In 1975 a second sewerage system was constructed to serve the booming eastern suburbs. The Eastern Treatment Plant at Bangholme treats about 330 million litres of sewage a day.

ENGINEERING HERITAGE NATIONAL MARKER

THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

State Library of Victoria

James Mansergh
the English engineer who designed the original system

State Library of Victoria

William Thwaites
Engineer-in-Chief who simplified the plans to create the system that still serves the city today

ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

Engineering Heritage National Marker placed on 11 September 2014
Engineers Australia Victoria Division – Melbourne Water

To find out more

www.engineeringheritage.com.au